

A  
L E T T E R  
TO THE  
REV. RICHARD PRICE,  
D.D. LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

UPON HIS  
“ *Discourse on the Love of our Country,*”  
&c. &c. &c.

[ Price 1s. ]

LETTER

WILLIAM RICHARDSON

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TO THE  
REV. RICHARD PRICE,  
D.D. LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

UPON HIS  
“ *Discourse on the Love of our Country,*”  
DELIVERED NOVEMBER 4, 1789,

TO THE SOCIETY FOR COMMEMORATING  
THE REVOLUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN.

BY  
WILLIAM COXE, A.M. F.R.S. F.A.S.  
RECTOR OF BEMERTON,

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L O N D O N:  
PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.  
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THE

TO THE

RICHARD PRICE

BY

AND

Expounded in the House of Commons

in the year 1793

TO THE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATING  
THE REVOLUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

BY

AND

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1793



## ADVERTISEMENT.

*THIS letter was written soon after Dr. Price's Discourse was given to the world; but, as some circumstances prevented its appearance at that period, the author intended to have suppressed its publication. Trusting, however, that its appearance will not, at this distance of time, be considered as unseasonable, he submits it to the candour of the public.*

BEMERTON,  
April 14, 1790.

ADVERTISEMENT

THIS BOOK, now written for the use of  
Pious Disciples, contains the whole  
of the Christian religion, as it is  
taught in the Bible, and is intended  
to be a short and plain exposition of  
the same, that all may be able to  
understand it, and to be able to  
show it to the children of the world.

By J. A. A.  
Author.

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SIR,

**W**HILE many parts of Europe are teeming with revolutions, it should seem the business of English wisdom to remain in our island on the vantage-ground of the British constitution, mark the progress of civil discord, and endeavour to prevent the conflagration from reaching ourselves,

In such moments of alarm and danger, it is the duty of every Englishman, who gives his opinions to the public on the events of the day, to explain to the people (what is consonant to truth) that our government is free from those evils and

oppressions which have occasioned the convulsions in France and Brabant; and, by explaining the blessings which pervade every part of our excellent constitution, to exhort the nation to content and tranquillity. But in opposition to these sound principles of candour and prudence, there is not wanting a spirit to prompt the British nation to adopt foreign and unsettled motives, and to quit national and established principles; to relinquish present and certain good for distant and uncertain advantages; to confound speculation with practice, and theory with experience; to exaggerate the imperfections of our government; to enforce the necessity of amending, or (as some would term it) of overturning our civil and religious establishment; and, under the semblance of religion and liberty, exciting the people to discontent and division.

Such were the reflections which occurred to me on reading your "*Discourse on the Love of our Country, delivered on November 4, 1789, before the Society for commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain,*" which

which contains a summary of your civil and religious opinions.

Feeling, as I do, the inestimable blessings of a free constitution, I look back, almost with adoration, to the character of William the Third, our great deliverer, and recollect with enthusiasm the memory of those among our forefathers, who assisted in establishing that revolution, which rescued us from arbitrary power, reduced within proper limits the prerogatives of the crown, and established on the firmest basis the rights of the people.

No language can be too warm, no expressions too strong, no panegyric too animated, in commemorating that glorious æra. Knowing your sentiments in favour of civil liberty, I expected to have found, in your commemorative discourse, a peculiar glow of colouring and animation of sentiment; I figured to myself, that you would have dwelt with rapturous satisfaction on the blessings which, since that period, have flowed upon this country; that you would have displayed its effects in pro-



moting public splendour and private security; and have traced the gradual progress of literature and reason, which followed this light of liberty.

Judge then, of my surprize and disappointment, when, after a short panegyric in favour of the Revolution; you enumerate its imperfections, and, instead of expressing your gratitude for that freedom which you, in common with every Briton, enjoy, you express your discontent. What I had long considered as a most glorious work, you look upon as imperfect; what I held to be a free constitution, you estimate as little better than slavery.

But permit me to examine, without partiality, the proofs which you have adduced in favour of these extraordinary assertions, and by which you attempt to shew, that *the state of this country is such as renders it an object of concern and anxiety, and that it wants the grand security of public liberty.* (P. 46.)

In a Discourse on the Love of our Country, you very properly begin your reasoning.

soning, by explaining what you mean by those expressions ; but, either I am entirely ignorant of the English language, or you seem to have used the word *Country* very different from the common acceptation.

*The love of our country, you say, has in all times been a subject of warm commendations ; and it is certainly a noble passion ; but, like all other passions, it requires regulation and direction. There are mistakes and prejudices by which, in this instance, we are in particular danger of being misled. — I will briefly mention some of these to you, and observe,*

1st. That by our country is meant, in this case, **NOT THE SOIL OR THE SPOT OF EARTH ON WHICH WE HAPPEN TO HAVE BEEN BORN** ; not the forests and fields, but that community of which we are members ; or that body of companions, and friends, and kindred, who are associated with us under the same constitution of government, protected by the same laws, and bound together by the same civil polity. (P. 2 and 3.)



But, according to my notions of language, the word *Country* includes not only the community of which we are members, but *our native soil*; and the duty of loving our country arises from considering ourselves as component parts of one whole; which parts mutually preserve and support each other. Here, then, will be found the truest fundamental principle of the love of our country; namely, in the mutual preservation and support of persons dwelling on the same spot.

Do you, Sir, who so well understand the nature of man, and how much he is the slave of habit and custom, allow nothing for the effect of that habit and custom? Do you allow nothing for the advantage of local situation? Do you suppose, that if the Dutch could be suddenly transplanted from their marshes in Holland to the mountains in Switzerland, that they would not *regret* their canals and their commerce? Do you imagine, that if the Swiss were as suddenly established, with all their privileges and immunities, in the marshes of Holland, that they would not *regret* their mountains

mountains and Alps? The very bleakness and barrenness of their mountains would become objects of *regret* and affection. For it is the language of truth as well as of poetry,

Dear is that shed to which their soul conforms,  
And dear that hill that lifts them to the storms;  
For, as the child, whom scaring sounds molest,  
Clings close and closer to the mother's breast;  
So the loud whirlwind, and the torrent's roar,  
But binds him to his native mountains more\*.

I must own, that I cannot so far divest myself of custom or prejudice (if it is prejudice) as to imagine, that even with the same government, language, and religion, I could be as happy in the heart of France, or on the shores of America, as on my native soil. But you proceed. (P. 3.)

*2dly. It is proper to observe, that even in this sense of our country, that love of it which is our duty, does not imply any conviction of the superior value of it to other countries, or any particular preference of its laws and con-*

\* Goldsmith's Traveller.

*stitution of government. Were this implied, the love of their country would be the duty of only a very small part of mankind; for there are few countries that enjoy the advantage of laws and governments which deserve to be preferred. To found, therefore, this duty on such a preference, would be to found it on error and delusion. It is, however, a common delusion. There is the same partiality in countries, to themselves, that there is in individuals. All our attachments should be accompanied, as far as possible, with right opinions. We are too apt to confine wisdom and virtue within the circle of our own acquaintance and party. Our friends, our country, and in short every thing related to us, we are disposed to overvalue. A wise man will guard himself against this delusion.*

But mankind does not and cannot possess such general wisdom: the bulk of the people are not and cannot be citizens of the world, but citizens of their country.

In answer to such visionary and refined sentiments, which are far above my comprehension,

prehension, let me bring to your recollection the following paragraph in the subsequent part of your discourse. (P. 9.)

*I must desire you to recollect that we are so constituted, that our affections are more drawn to some among mankind than to others, in proportion to their degrees of nearness to us, and our power of being useful to them. It is obvious that this is a circumstance in the constitution of our natures which proves the wisdom and goodness of our Maker; for had our affections been determined alike to all our fellow-creatures, human life would have been a scene of embarrassment and distraction. Our regards, according to the order of nature, begin with ourselves; and every man is charged primarily with the care of himself. Next comes our families, and benefactors, and friends, and after them our country. **WE CAN DO LITTLE FOR THE INTEREST OF MANKIND AT LARGE.** Yet you add, To this interest, however, all interests are subordinate. The noblest principle in our nature is the regard to general justice, and that good-will which embraces all the world, or, as you express yourself*  
still



still more strongly in another place (P. 44) *But at the same time we ought always to consider ourselves MORE as citizens of the world, than as members of any particular community.*

But by extracting from the love of our country, the love of our native soil, and substituting in its stead, as you do afterwards, the love of the world, you annihilate what is specific and fixed, and substitute what is general and indeterminate; you annihilate what "speaks home" to every man's heart, and substitute what is too refined to influence our feelings, or interest our affections. You thereby take away all specific idea of a country; you weaken the energies of action, and destroy a ruling principle which cannot operate without a settled object.

But you endeavour, Sir, to establish your opinion on the authority of the gospel, which, as you very justly observe, could not inculcate on men an attachment to their country, because the religion of Christ was an universal religion founded on  
general

general benevolence. Our Saviour himself tells us, that his kingdom was not of this world. He never laid down any rules of civil polity, and never interfered with human governments. His comprehensive benevolence embraced the whole universe, and did not confine itself to time or place, to local or temporary distinctions: but can fallible men imitate the perfection of the Son of God! We must have specific motives of action to influence our practice, and interest our affections; and, as our weak minds cannot embrace the whole world, we must content ourselves to be satisfied with loving our country. Christ had no occasion to inculcate that duty; it is universally felt; it is born and bred up with us; it is "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and, as you justly observe in another place, *our Saviour, though he did not inculcate that duty by precept, encouraged it by his example.* (P. 45.)

Again you support your opinion by the parable of the good Samaritan; the design

of which you justly observe was to shew to a Jew, that even a Samaritan, and consequently all men of all nations and religions were included in the precept, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. (P. 8, and 9.)

But neither this passage, nor any other passage in the scriptures, can warrant the conclusion, which is the result of your doctrine. For you affect to go farther than our Saviour himself. You say, thou shalt love thy neighbour *more* than thyself; the world *more* than thy country; a conclusion, which extends the love of the world beyond the bounds of reason and nature; and substitutes a general philanthropy instead of a particular duty. And, to use the words of a just and elegant moral writer \*; “ Benevolence points to our country as to her only adequate mark; whatever falls short of that glorious end is too small for her full gratifications; and all beyond is too immense for her grasp.”

\* Melmoth, in Letters of Fitzosborn, Letter 30.

But



But when I mention the duty to our country as the first of human duties, I certainly agree with you in reprobating that love of our country, *which consists in a love of domination, a desire of conquest, and a thirst for grandeur and glory, by extending territory, and enslaving surrounding countries;* (P. 5.) and as the same moral writer, whom I just quoted, expresses himself much better than I can.

“ I cannot, however, but agree with you, that this affection was productive of infinite mischief to mankind, as it broke out among the Romans in the impious spirit of unjust conquests. But it should be remembered at the same time, that it is the usual artifice of ambition to mask herself in the semblance of patriotism : and it can be no just objection to the noblest of the social passions, that it is capable of being inflamed beyond its natural heat, and turned, by the arts of policy, to promote those destructive purposes, which it was originally implanted to prevent.”

And

And I would also particularly recommend to your attention the subsequent paragraph from the same admirable writer.

“ This zeal for our country may, indeed, become irrational, not only when it thus pushes us to act counter to the natural rights of any other community; but likewise when it impels us to take the measures of violence in opposition to the general sense of our own. For may not public happiness be estimated by the same standard as that of private? and as every man's own opinion must determine his particular satisfaction, shall not the general opinion be considered as decisive of the general interests \* ?”

\* I would recommend to the perusal of the reader the whole letter from which the paragraphs in the text are taken, as the love of our country is therein truly described and defined, equally cleared on one hand, from too great selfishness, and on the other, from too great refinement.

See Fitzosborn's Letters, L. 30. to Clytander, concerning the love of our country.

You

You next include our whole duty to our country, in the promotion of truth, virtue, and liberty, and in treating these separate articles, you have sketched, with a masterly hand, the good effects arising to the community from the diffusion of knowledge and virtue, and the propagation of liberty.

You then revert to the joy expressed by the nation on the king's recovery, and at once censure all the addresses on that joyful occasion as proofs of the grossest adulation and servility.

*Had I been to address the King on a late occasion, I should have been inclined to do it in a style very different from that of most of the addresses, and to use some such language as the following:—"I rejoice, Sir, in your recovery. I thank God for his goodness to you. I honour you not only as my King, but as almost the only lawful King in the world, because the only one who owes his crown to the choice of his people. May you enjoy all possible happiness. May God shew you the folly of those effusions of adulation which you are now receiving,*

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*ceiving, and guard you against their effects. May you be led to such a just sense of the nature of your situation, and endowed with such wisdom, as shall render your restoration to the government of these kingdoms a blessing to it, and engage you to consider yourself as more properly the Servant than the Sovereign of your people. (P. 25. 26.)*

Surely, Sir, you argue too nicely, when you cite the common forms of an address as instances of the grossest servility.

But, to use your own words, I must not forget the opposite extreme to that now taken notice of; that is, a disdainful pride, derived from a consciousness of equality, or, perhaps, superiority, in respect of all that gives true dignity to men in power, and producing a contempt of them, and a disposition to treat them with rudeness and insult. It is a trite observation, that extremes generally beget one another. This is particularly true in the present case. Persons justly informed on the subject of government, when they see men dazzled by looking up to high stations, and

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observe

*observe loyalty carried to a length that implies ignorance and servility: such persons, in such circumstances, are in danger of spurning at all public authority, and throwing off that respectful demeanor to persons invested with it which the order of society requires. (P. 26. 27.)*

I am proud, Sir, to own, that I was one of those herd of *sycophants* who signed an address, although without any of those ideas of servility and adulation so much reprobated by you. I considered it as the general voice of the country, bursting forth at once, not only for the recovery of a beloved King, but for his recovery at a moment, which delivered us from the weak government of a regency, and from the conflict of rival and powerful parties, which might have ended in civil commotions. Nor could I, at such a time, have so narrowed my notions, as to be making definitions, whether the King was the *servant* or the *sovereign* of the people, or forming an address similar to that of the Quakers to Charles the Second on his Restoration: "Friend



Charles, we are sorry thy father is dead, we are glad to see thee."

Under the article liberty, you have described, with a peculiar warmth of colouring, the evils and dangers to be dreaded from the encroachments of the crown; you observe, *Adulation is the extreme to which mankind in general have been most prone; for it has oftener happened, that men have been too passive than too unruly; and the rebellion of kings against their people has been more common, and done more mischief, than the rebellion of people against their kings.* (P. 22.)

But are there no evils, and is there no danger from the contrary extreme? namely, from the spirit of murmur and discontent; from a desire to exaggerate the defects, and to diminish the benefits of our free constitution; from the spirit of aristocracy, which leaves to the crown only the shadow, and monopolizes the substance, of authority; and finally, from the spirit of democracy, which, under pretence of equality, levels all distinctions, mistakes licentiousness for liberty.

liberty, and introduces anarchy and confusion \*.

The crown, limited by the Revolution, and by succeeding restrictions, is not sufficiently powerful to excite those serious apprehensions and alarms, which you are desirous of spreading; and, perhaps, any farther restrictions would so much circumscribe its authority, as to render the aristocratical and democratical parts of the constitution too predominant.

Thinking as you do, you very properly encourage and animate the Dissenters to persevere in their attempt to petition Parliament for a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (P. 36) according to the right of every subject who conceives that he is aggrieved: and I do not blame your expressions, however strong they may appear, when you say, that you *are disposed to think*

\* Experience has sufficiently proved, that a democracy is not a proper form of government for a large state. It may do for the small cantons of Switzerland; but in great empires it must either end in monarchy, or engender perpetual anarchy.



*it impossible that the enemies to the repeal of the test laws should not soon become ashamed, and give up their opposition.* (P. 39.) But permit me to add, without entering upon the merits of the question, and with the highest respect for the Dissenters in general, that the mode and manner in which they are now proceeding, is inconsistent with that candour and liberality of sentiment by which they have hitherto been distinguished; I mean an association of the whole body of Dissenters throughout the kingdom, to vote for no member at the next election, who will not support the repeal of the Test Acts.

Although I am too great a friend to civil and religious liberty, not to wish their repeal, if it might be found compatible with the safety of our civil and ecclesiastical establishment; yet I must beg leave to remark, that the Dissenters, by their present conduct, do not act generously but partially; they make the general good subservient to their particular interests; they make the love of their country to consist in (what you have  
fo

so properly reprobated) *a blind and narrow principle, forming men into combinations, and the desire of private interest overcoming the public affections.* (P. 5.)

For what does this association intend? to exclude every person from being a member of Parliament, who does not exactly agree with them on the necessity of repealing the Test Acts. But, may not a man be a good member of Parliament without supporting that opinion?

You object to all tests, and yet you yourselves are going to impose a test upon all members of Parliament; and you act thus narrowly and partially in a point, on which the national salvation ultimately depends, namely, the election of proper representatives to serve in parliament.

But perhaps you may see and acknowledge the injustice of this mode of proceeding by the following instances: Mr. Wilberforce, remarkable for the uprightness of his conduct, for his disinterestedness, benevolence, and industry in performing his parliamentary duty, is member for Yorkshire.

Let us suppose him, at the next general election, requesting a Dissenter for his vote; What must be the Dissenter's answer? "I have the highest opinion of your parliamentary conduct; I admire your benevolence and liberality of sentiment; but, unless you support the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, I am under the necessity of voting for your opponent, because he has promised to favour our petition."

Let us again suppose, that Mr. Pitt was member for a county; What must be the answer of a Dissenter whom he requested for his vote? "I supported you on constitutional principles, when the king appointed you minister, and dissolved the last parliament; I approve, in general, the measures of your administration: you have introduced œconomy into the finances; you are gradually paying off the national debt; you have secured our internal tranquillity; you have raised our credit and honour among the nations of Europe; by a master-piece of policy and address you saved Holland from being a province of France; and you now  
maintain

maintain us in peace, while parts of Europe are desolated with war, and parts are struggling with civil convulsions; but I cannot vote for you, because you oppose the repeal of the Test Act."

But to return, Sir, to your discourse. If I were a member of parliament, and ever so much inclined to vote for a repeal of the Test Act, your discourse would prevent me, for the following reason:

You, Sir, whose opinion has great weight, and who speak the sentiments of a very large body amongst the Dissenters, openly declare, that you will not be content with the repeal of the Test Acts. You avow your disapprobation of many parts of our constitution, and call upon the Dissenters not to stop, till they shall have effected those changes, which you think are essential to a free government. You act candidly and honestly at least, but perhaps with little judgment and prudence. For you thereby deter many honest and well-meaning men from supporting you in one instance, which they might not disapprove, but as leading to future innovations.

And

And here let me call to your recollection, a passage in Dr. Priestley's History of the Corruption of Christianity, which is very applicable to the present purpose.

Speaking of the doctrine of atonement, the doctor adds, vol. 1. p. 275.

“ To establish this article was a work,  
 “ as we have seen, of long time, and there-  
 “ fore we must be content, if the overthrow  
 “ of it be gradual also. Great buildings  
 “ do not often fall at once; but some apart-  
 “ ments will still be thought habitable after  
 “ the rest are seen to be in ruins. It is the  
 “ same with great *systems of doctrine*, the  
 “ parts of which have long gone together.  
 “ The force of evidence obliges us at first  
 “ to abandon some *one* part of them only,  
 “ and we do not immediately see that, in  
 “ consequence of this, we ought to aban-  
 “ don others, and at length the *whole*. And  
 “ indeed, could this have been seen from  
 “ the beginning, it would have been with  
 “ much more difficulty, that we should  
 “ have been prevailed upon to abandon any  
 “ part. The very proposal might have  
 “ staggered.



“ staggered us ; and any doubt with respect  
 “ to the whole might have been followed  
 “ by universal scepticism. It hath pleased  
 “ divine providence, therefore, to open the  
 “ minds of men by easy degrees, and the de-  
 “ tection of one falsehood prepares us for  
 “ the detection of another, *till, before we*  
 “ *are aware of it, we find no trace left of the*  
 “ *immense, and seemingly well compacted system.*  
 “ *Thus, by degrees, we can reconcile ourselves*  
 “ *to abandon all the parts, when we could*  
 “ *never have thought of giving up the whole.*”

In like manner you, not content with  
 obtaining the repeal of the Test Acts,  
 maintain the necessity of amending many  
 other parts of our political and ecclesiastical  
 establishment, crying out in the language of  
 Horace, (Epist. lib. ii. v. 45.)

——— Caudæque pilos ut equinæ  
 Paullatim vello : & demo unum, demo & item unum :

You first attack our religious establish-  
 ment. Not content with stating the propriety  
 of revising our articles and liturgy ; you  
 even urge the necessity of abolishing all dis-  
 tinctions ;

tinctions; and encourage *all men of weight, from their rank and literature, to set up a separate worship for themselves, if they dislike that mode which is prescribed by public authority; or if they can find no worship out of the church which they approve.* (P. 18.)

But where can be found a sufficient number of men of rank and literature, *who think exactly alike* in matters of religion or politics; and who, among them, shall prescribe the mode of worship? How then could a congregation be formed of persons agreeing alike; and if formed, would they not again separate, and be perpetually changing as their caprices operated upon them at the moment? What fatal effects, therefore, would not this mode of proceeding have upon the public at large? What an unsettled opinion of things, the most sacred, would not prevail!

You yourself allow, that *all communities will have some religion; and that imperfection in our public forms of worship, affords no excuse for neglecting public worship.* (P. 17.)

Those, therefore, who are anxious to  
change



change or overturn a long established system of ecclesiastical polity, so connected and interwoven with our civil government as not to be separated without the danger of undermining our excellent constitution, ought in return to propose a new system, before they destroy the old one. And what is the system of religion which you would introduce and inculcate? (P. 13.) *Set religion before them as a rational service, consisting not in any rites and ceremonies, but in worshipping God with a pure heart and practising righteousness from the fear of his displeasure and the apprehension of a future righteous judgment, and that gloomy and cruel superstition will be abolished which has hitherto gone under the name of religion, and to the support of which civil government has been perverted.*—As if any religion did, or could, ever exist without rites and ceremonies; or as if all religions with rites and ceremonies, were gloomy and cruel superstitions.

In fact, religion, if not embodied with some rites and ceremonies, is a visionary religion; and the experience of all ages has proved,

proved, that no tyrants are more gloomy, cruel, and fanatical than visionary enthusiasts. England, in the convulsions of the last century, which shook her to the very center, felt the fatal effects of such an unsubstantial religion, and the direful oppressions inflicted by a great but visionary despot\*.

You next attack our civil establishment ; and contend, (P. 41.) that the *inequality of our representation* is our fundamental grievance ; and you add, that *such is our inattention, that nothing will be done towards gaining us this essential blessing, till some great calamity again alarms our fears, or till some great abuse of power again provokes our resentment ; or perhaps till the acquisition of a pure and equal representation of other countries (while we are amused with the shadow) kindles our shame ; and in a note you explain what you mean by a shadow ; a representation chosen chiefly by the treasury, and a few thousand of the dregs of the people*

\* Cromwell.

*who are generally paid for their votes* \*. That is, if I understand the passage rightly, you conclude, that an *equal* representation would necessarily render a *pure* representation; and would exclude all influence and corruption in the election of members of parliament.

And do you, Sir, with your good sense and profound political knowledge, really think,

\* In his "Essay on Civil Liberty" (Page 10) Dr. Price has also stigmatised, in severe terms, and for the same reasons, our excellent constitution, because it does not correspond in every respect with his speculative and theoretical opinions; and because the members of parliament are not *chosen for a short term, and by every person of the community; and are not subject to controul from their constituents*; two points admirably adapted to a democracy, but inadmissible and impracticable in a mixed government like ours; he prefers the arbitrary authority of a despot to the mild and rational influence of the British government. "If the persons, to whom the trust of government is committed are chosen for long terms, by a part only of the state; and if during that term they are subject to no controul from their constituents, the *very idea of liberty will be lost*, and the power of choosing constituents becomes nothing but a power lodged in a few, to choose, at certain periods, a body of magistrates for themselves, and for the rest of the community. And if a state is so sunk, that a majority of its representatives are elected by an  
"handful

think, that an equal representation would produce these effects. Do you suppose, that any laws, or any mode of representation could exclude influence and corruption; could prevent men from being governed by their passions and interest; could annihilate the effects of envy, disappointment, and ambition; could introduce perfection upon earth, and transform us into angels of light. You will permit me to hold a contrary opinion; and to assert, that the very means you propose to establish for the purpose, would be the very means to extend

“handful of the meanest persons in it, whose votes are always paid for; and if, also, there is an higher will, on which even these mock representatives themselves depend, and that directs their voices, in these circumstances it will be an abuse of language to say, that the state possesses liberty. Private men, indeed, might be allowed the exercise of liberty; as they might also under the most despotic government: but it would be an indulgence or connivance derived from the spirit of the times, or from an accidental mildness in the administration: and rather than be governed in such a manner, it would, perhaps, be better to be governed by the will of one man, without any representation; for a representation so degenerated, could answer no other end than to mislead and deceive, by disguising slavery, and keeping up a form of liberty, when the reality was lost.”

that

that influence, and increase that corruption, which you so justly reprobate. Perhaps, the instance most to the present point, may be taken from the constitution of the Grisons; and, as I have already given my sentiments on that head, you will excuse me, if I extract from a late publication \*, what relates to the present subject. After describing the Grison Diet, which is an annual Parliament, in the choice of whose members every male of the state has a vote, and whose members are controuled in their votes by their constituents, three points which, according to your opinion, form the essence of a perfect constitution, I thus conclude:

“ Those theorists, who are so anxious to reform the English House of Commons, by transferring to the people at large the election of their representatives in parliament, might, on examining with attention the features of the Grison Diet, fondly imagine, that an *annual assembly, in the choice of whose members every male of the state*

\* Travels in Switzerland, v. 3. p. 230, Letter 84.

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should



*should have a vote*, and which, in all material occurrences, should be liable to be *directed by its constituents*, must necessarily be the purest sanctuary of general freedom. In this instance, however, their conjectures are by no means consonant to fact and experience; as corruption and influence are not in any national parliament more conspicuous than in the Diet of the Grisons.

“ For although, in general, those deputies, annually chosen by every male of a stated age, are subject to be controuled in their votes by written orders from their constituents, yet they frequently contrive to elude this restriction. Sometimes the instructions are drawn up, with the consent of the community, under the sole direction of the deputy himself; at other times an exemption from positive instructions, and the power of voting at his own pleasure, is purchased by the deputy from his constituents. Sometimes again the deputy, although he may not have interest sufficient to gain either of these points, has still sufficient address to get his instructions so obscurely

securely worded as to admit a doubtful interpretation.

“ By various intrigues of this kind the greatest part of the deputies ultimately acquire the power of voting as they please; and as they chiefly obtain this power by corrupting their constituents, most of them in return sell their vote to the leading members of the diet. For most questions are carried, and most causes decided by bribery. Nor can it well be otherwise, when the electors are persons in needy circumstances; and the members who have purchased their seats, are not themselves exalted by their possessions above temptation,

“ Thus then the leading members secure an unbounded sway in the affairs of the diet. But still it should seem, that whatever influence they may obtain by corrupting the deputies; yet as that assembly itself does not in many cases decide finally, they could not acquire the same authority in those concerns, which must be referred to the communities at large. Here at least we might expect the unbiassed sense of the

majority of the people. But it may be universally remarked, that the delegation of deliberative authority to the people at large, unavoidably tends to introduce an actual, though not an acknowledged aristocracy. For a numerous populace summoned to determine upon political, legislative, and judicial questions, far above their comprehensions, must necessarily resign themselves to the direction of more informed men, especially when aided by the recommendation of superior wealth. As the deputies are generally the chiefs of those communities which they represent, they must of course have the principal influence, and easily find means to incline the opinion of the people to the side which they have espoused. In fact, without this aristocratical influence, the excess of freedom would often degenerate into anarchy, and public deliberations would be attended with endless disputes and factions.

“ If therefore corruption and aristocratical influence can alone diminish factions and prevent anarchy in so poor a country as that  
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of the Grisons, and in a republic scarcely known among the nations of Europe; to what a dreadful excess must the same evils prevail, if the same mode of electing, and giving instructions to members of parliament, subsisted in a kingdom like England; where riches and luxury are continually advancing with such rapid strides; where the most important political and commercial debates are agitated without restraint; and where the decisions of public affairs frequently affect the peace and interests of all Europe.

“ Theoretical reasoners may, indeed, attempt to prove, that the best method of preventing corruption is to augment the number of electors, from the chimerical idea, that large numbers cannot be bribed. But if we appeal from uncertain theory to more certain experience, we shall find, that this argument is contradicted by the history of all ages. Among the Grecian republics, those commonwealths in which the magistrates were chosen by the *people at large*, were the most venal. Among the Romans,

the most effectual means which Julius Cæsar, the most able politician of his age, employed to subjugate his country, was to extend the privileges and votes of Roman citizens to *all* the inhabitants of Italy.

“ The members of the Polish Diet \*, which is no less venal than the Diet of the Grisons, are chosen by needy and *numerous* electors, of whom far the greatest part possess no property; and whose *numbers*, instead of preventing, necessarily tend to increase influence and corruption.”

The limits of this letter will not permit me to dwell any longer on the question, concerning the necessity of reforming the House of Commons; but I will beg leave, through you, to recommend to the candid and judicious reader the remarks of a most able writer on that subject, who seems, in my opinion, to have established, that the present House of Commons, with all its real or supposed defects, is exactly suited to our constitution, that it could not

\* See Travels into Poland, Russia, &c. vol. i. b. i. c. vi. and viii.



be essentially altered without the greatest danger to the state; that a House of Commons, constituted in another manner, would be attended with as many, or perhaps greater evils, than those which the advocates for parliamentary reform so fondly wish to remove, at the hazard of undermining the foundations of our excellent constitution \*.

I shall not detain you with any remarks on the severe and invidious censures which you cast on Mr. Pitt's administration, for what you call *encroachments on the security of our liberties*, viz. the act for placing the duties on Tobacco under the collection of the Excise, that for farming the Horse-tax, and that for laying an additional halfpenny on News-papers, or, as you express yourself, with more dignity, "*the extension of the Excise laws, the introduction of the custom of farming taxes, and the additional burdens lately thrown on the freedom of the press, and the circulation of intelligence*;" observa-

\* Paley's Remarks on the British Constitution, in his Moral Philosophy, vol. ii. page 217—231.

tions more calculated to grace the column of a news-paper, than to be introduced into a sermon.

These I presume are all the specks, which even your penetrating eye can discover in Mr. Pitt's administration, and which his opposition to the repeal of the Test Acts has led you to magnify to such a degree, as to call them "*encroachments on our liberties*," and to alledge them, among other reasons, as sufficient to induce your brethren to *do their utmost to save their country from the dangers that threaten it.*

Nor shall I follow you, Sir, in all your exulting observations on the new form of government established in France; because, the state of that country renders all conjectures on the permanency of the present establishment uncertain and groundless; because, what you consider as a settled, I regard as an unsettled government; because (however I may rejoice that a generous and polite people may have burst the bonds of despotism) yet I cannot but regret, that the members of the national assembly, instead  
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of meliorating or modifying their former government, instead of being contented with limiting the crown in the great features of despotism, and with securing the personal liberty and property of the individual, are, without duly considering the prejudices and customs of the nation, undermining, overturning, or annihilating the whole fabric of their civil and ecclesiastical polity, and are establishing a motley mixture of democratical and monarchical government, ill calculated for so large an empire just bursting from the shackles of extreme despotism, and liable to fall into the other extreme of licentiousness and anarchy; a government which, unless greatly modified and changed from its present form (if it has at present any form) must either revert to despotism, or engender perpetual anarchy; a government, nevertheless, which you think superior to ours, and which, in your opinion, possesses the *substance*, while we retain only *the shadow of liberty*.

Fortunately for the happiness of this country,

country, the greatest part of the British nation do not agree with you: they are satisfied with the present form of government, and the present mode of representation; they recoil with horror at the thoughts of introducing Gallic notions of liberty, just forming in embryo; they reprobate your censures of the British government as invidious and unjust, and consider many of your political opinions (however excellent they may appear in theory) as too refined for practice, and containing principles tending to overturn the established government in church and state.

Permit me, Sir, to add, that I cannot avoid expressing my regret at seeing the pulpit perverted with political and party distinctions; the characters of our blessed Saviour and his apostles introduced as recommending, under the notion of general benevolence, the love of the world in preference to the love of our country; the Gospel of Peace, as encouraging struggles for power and interest; yourself presuming to compare the independence of America, the convulsive



vulstive efforts for freedom in France and Brabant, and the prospect of new revolutions, with the good tidings of joy and salvation announced on the birth of Christ, and quoting, as applicable to yourself and the present times, the words of the prophet Simeon, addressed to the Saviour of mankind; "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" (P. 49.)

As human nature reaches not to perfection, particular defects may be easily discovered in all civil and religious establishments, and in all human constitutions there is a mixture of good and evil; but it is highly unfair and uncandid to dwell principally on the defects, and overlook the benefits.

The only fair and candid mode of proceeding is to compare the general good with the general evil; and to be satisfied, if the good predominates over the evil.

But I trust, that my countrymen will not be led away even by the powers of your eloquence, or by the most specious mode



mode of reasoning, to believe that our government is as grievous and intolerable as the despotism of Turkey; or that, because the Test Acts are not repealed; because we have not an equal representation; because the duty on Tobacco is levied by the Excise; the horse-tax farmed; and an additional half-penny is laid on news-papers; and because, in our late addresses on a most joyful occasion, we did not style the king (as you chuse to style him) the *servant* of the people; therefore, we do not enjoy the inestimable blessings of the Habeas Corpus Act, of the trial by jury, of incorrupt and impartial courts of justice, and of assenting to no laws, and paying no taxes, but with consent of the people, by means of their representatives in parliament; in a word, of every privilege and right which constitutes the essence of a free government, distinguished on one hand from despotism, and on the other from too great licentiousness and anarchy.

If the opinion of a man, who has twice travelled over the greatest part of Europe;  
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who has examined with peculiar attention, not only the different governments, but the different shades in each government; who has been careful to distinguish the practice from the theory, and has made the condition of the lower class of people the particular object of his attention, can have any weight; I am bold to avow, that the English constitution is of all others, *that*, in which the true principles of liberty are best understood and practised, and that I have visited no country, in which persons of all ranks and denominations possess such solid comforts, such real and substantial happiness.

But, Sir, I have done. It is impossible perhaps to be entirely dispassionate in treating subjects so interesting to the rights of the community; yet, I trust, that I have not exceeded the bounds of moderation; that, in discussing your opinions with that freedom, which your candour will not only excuse but applaud, I have said nothing disrespectful of yourself. If any expressions of that sort should have unfortunately slipped my pen, *indicta sunt*, let them be consider-

ed as unaid. Difference of opinion should never be attended with harshness or ill-will; but should rather promote mutual forbearance and mutual complacency. I am concerned to differ from an author, whose character, whose abilities, whose literature I have long respected; but the love of my country, my respect, my passion for that free constitution, whose blessings I enjoy with gratitude, and which I dread to see, under the idea of amendment, mutilated and deformed, have extorted from me this effusion of the moment.

I am, SIR,

With great respect,

Your most obedient

Humble Servant,

WILLIAM COXE.



This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some faint horizontal lines and small dark spots, possibly due to age or scanning artifacts. There is no text or other markings on the page.

